THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (PROF. SAIFUDDIN SOZ): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The revision of the current forest policy is under consideration to ensure greater involvement of local communities in guarding and managing the forests. In addition, the revision also contemplates a comprehensive policy for the management of forests in the north-eastern region.

(c) Government does not support any global forest covention, which would affect the sovereign use of the forest resources within the country.

Deep Sea Exploration

*147. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the petroleum Ministry is pinning great hopes on deep sea exploration in the future; if so, whether any such areas have been identified so far;

(b) whether his Ministry would be auctioning the new oil exploration blocks under the New Exploration Policy (NELP) by the end of July, 1997 as reported in the Hindustan times, dated the 10th July, 1997;

(c) whether ONGC, OIL and IOC will have to compete with private sector firms to bag the exploration blocks; and

(d) if so, by when blocks under the first round NELP are likely to be auctioned and taxes proposed to be slashed under New Tax Code?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI JANESHWAR MISHRA): (a) The new Exploration Licensing Policy aims to give a thrust to exploration activities in deep water. ONGC has prioritised three deep water locations for drilling in 1997-98, one each in Kerela-Konkan, Krishna-Godavari and Cauvery basin. Besides, recent surveys carried out by DGH have indicated presence of large structures, a few with possible signature of natural gas/ gas hydrates?

(b) Exploration blocks will be offered under NELP.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) The exact schedule for offer of exploration blocks under New Exploration Licensing Policy is yet to be worked out.

Dealership/Distributorship of Oil Corporation to sons and daugherts of GMs

148. SHRI GAUFRAN AZAM: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the sons and daughters of the GMs of Oil Corporation have been awarded the dealerships/distributorships of Oil Corporation;

(b) if so, what are the names of such officers;

(c) whether these allottees fulfil the other eligibility criteria;

(d) what action is being taken/ proposed to be taken against such officers;

(e) whether these officers are still on important positions having the capacity to influence Government; and

(f) whether such allotments have been cancelled; if not, what are the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS and Materal (SHRI JANESHWAR MISHRA): (a) to (c) All files pertaining to allotment of dealerships/distributorships of petroleum products under discretionary quota of Government since April, 1992 are at present with Delhi High Court, before whom such allotments have been challenged through writ petition No. 400395 filed by the Centre for Public Interest Litigation. Relationship of an applicant with VIPs of officials of Government/Oil Companies etc., is not a criterion and no such information is